Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women

(Deemed to be University Estd. u/s 3 of UGC Act 1956, Category 'A' by MHRD
Re-accredited with A++ Grade by NAAC. CGPA 3.65/4, Category I by UGC
Coimbatore - 641 043, Tamil Nadu, India

Empowerment through Resistance: Women in the Novels of Manju Kapur

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A Synopsis Submitted to

Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women,
Coimbatore - 641 043

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English

August - 2023

Synopsis

Indian English Literature is a major milestone to record the injustices against women in the patriarchal society. Patriarchy is the key word to feminism which governs the lives of women, who are considered to be inferior in the Indian society. Feminism attempts to study and solve gender-based problems and questions the preconceived assumptions about the multiple roles of men and women in the society. The postulates of feminism critique the notion that man is the subject, essential, transcendent, and absolute while a woman is an object, inessential, mutilated, and incomplete in all spheres of life. The global view of feminism refers to the belief that men and women deserve equality in terms of gender and social rights.

Feminism insinuates that women should have equal rights and opportunities like men in all aspects of their lives to choose the path of independence. The 'Big Three' schools of feminist thought namely, Liberal/Reformist or Mainstream feminism, Radical feminism, and Socialist/Marxist feminism attempt to emancipate women from the narrowed gender roles. The schools of feminism focus to establish legal protection for women and demand compassion, respect, and understanding from their male counterparts. It seeks to abolish patriarchy and challenges the unjust social norms and institutions to eliminate the social domination of women by arguing that equality can be achieved through social reforms. It provides an image of female freedom paving way for the possibility to transform the suppressed lives of women. The emergence of feminist literature and women's writings give voice to the anguish, aspirations, and assertions of women.

Indian English women writers envision feminism to unfetter the female folk from stale patriarchal social customs and traditions. The ultimate goal of women's writings is to liberate the feminine outlook from the authoritarian control of male domination. Indian women novelists wish to break the patriarchal periphery that curbs feminine growth and development through their women-centered literary works. The literary endeavours of Indian women writings focus on the issues like domestic violence, gender disparity, and individual consciousness to uplift the status and position of women. The women writers like Toru Dutt, Krupabai Satthianadhan, Swarna Kumari Debi, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, Swarna Kumari Ghosal, and Cornelia Sorabji, through their writings, have crusaded to annihilate the social evils like sati, child marriage, dowry, and widowhood that disintegrate the lives of women in the Indian society. They have documented female convictions to put an end to women's suffering and wish to eradicate the marginalisation of women at social, political, and economic levels. The contemporary women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shoba De, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, Gita Hariharan, and Manju Kapur, in their novels, attempt to strengthen the potentials and proficiencies of Indian women through education and economic independence.

The present research delves into the feminine prospects represented in the literary works of the renowned Indian women novelist, Manju Kapur. The literary writings of Manju Kapur tend to unravel the fact that feminism is the consequence of the culture and society, which are shaped, dictated, and governed by men to suit their requirements and interests, regardless of women's basic needs and happiness. The novelist interrogates the patriarchal moralities which deprive women of their basic human rights. She highlights

that it is not women alone, but the entire human race that would suffer due to the oppression of women. She supports women's quest for self-revelation, self-respect, self-analysis, and self-discovery to lead an unconstrained life.

The novels of Manju Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008), *Custody* (2011), and *Brothers* (2016) are set in the Indian patriarchal norms, where issues of women revolve around personal desires, family responsibilities, and social expectations. It also deals with varied subjects like parenting, generation gap, struggle for survival, cultural displacement due to immigration, institution of marriage, and workplace crimes. The language and themes integrated into the novels of Manju Kapur reveal the meaningful correlations between the psychological condition and emotional reactions of her women characters. The study deals with the experiences of women from their childhood to adulthood, the discourse of matrimony, and the workplace challenges in the novels of Manju Kapur.

The novelist features women protagonists, who are caught between the dichotomy of tradition and modernity in their efforts to attain liberation in the secular Indian culture. They question the conventional standards that degrade the eminence of women when their characteristic traits like sacrifice, purity, softness, excessive endurance, adaptability, silence, and self-effacement go unrecognised. They struggle to eradicate the unequal distribution of power between man-woman and the burden of inhibitions that are imposed on women for ages by parents, family, and society. They wish to liberate their conscience to be free from the clichéd traditional norms and the torments of gender bias. They strive to establish their identity by constant critique, resistance, and subversion of the patriarchal tradition.

The research study entitled "**Empowerment through Resistance: Women in the Novels of Manju Kapur**" examines the status of women in the contemporary society from confinement to liberation. The study of the novels of Manju Kapur intends to re-evaluate the significance of womanhood and redefine the identity of women. The research proposes to affirm that feminism helps women to eliminate their marginalisation and embolden them to revive their livelihood and existence in the tyrannical patriarchal society. It justifies the research gap by analysing the parenting styles and its impact on the fostering of girl children in the novels of Manju Kapur. The feminist ideologies of Simon de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949), Rosalind Miles in *Who Cooked the Last Supper: The Women's History of the World* (1989), and Jean V. Matthews in *The Rise of New Woman* (2003) support the research study to understand the feministic elements which are inherent in the novels of Manju Kapur. The parenting styles formulated by the famous psychologist, Diana Baumrind in the 1960s are applied to the novels of Manju Kapur to substantiate the parenting practices and nurturance of children in the Indian families. The research follows the methodology as recommended by the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* ninth edition, for documentation, quotation, end notes, and bibliography.

Thesis Statement:

The writings of Manju Kapur attempt to formulate reformations in the prejudiced parenting, outrageous marital strategies, challenges in work environments, and irrational conventions of Indian society for the socio-cultural, economic, and political empowerment of women in the modern era of globalisation.

Objectives:

- Parental upbringing has an impact on the personality development and individuality of girl children.
- Exploration of the dilemmas of present-day urban educated middle-class Indian women, who are trapped in the patriarchal social set-up.
- Promote a dependent-free life for women in the Indian institution of marriage.
- Reformation of women from subservience to prominence.
- Provide better solutions for different kinds of challenges faced by the women characters in the professional sphere.

The research study is divided into five chapters and each chapter examines the novels of Manju Kapur on the aspects of feminism and ends to suggest the means of acquiring favourable social and family environments that empower women in the world of patriarchy. Chapter One "**Introduction**" presents the women-centric issues depicted in the novels of Indian English women writers. The women writings of Indian English literature mark the emergence of feminism in India. The women writers believe that the goals of feminist literary theory can be achieved through the consolidated efforts of literary writers, critics, and sociologists. They represent the social evils like patriarchy, gender discrimination, and oppression in the patriarchal social set-up which create an opportunity for the women populace to voice forth their unheard aspirations and desires. The chapter identifies the remarkable characteristics of the writings of Manju Kapur, her contribution to Indian English literature and the phenomenal portrayal of Indian women.

The review of literature on the works of Manju Kapur and the outline of the research design of the present study are illustrated.

Chapter Two "**Parenting: The Nexus of Human Life**" analyses the parenting practices on raising girl children with reference to Diana Baumrind's parenting styles. The impact of parental fostering on the personality of the women protagonists, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita, and Tapti Gaina, underlines the significance of parental guidance and cultural values in shaping their individuality. The parent-child relationship is established on interdependence, but in the novels, the relationship of the daughters with their parents is distorted due to prejudiced parenting practices. The novelist argues that discrimination based on gender starts within the family from the day a girl child is born. The women protagonists try to create an amicable family environment, free of gender bias insisting on the elimination of differential treatment of parents, who favour sons over daughters.

Chapter Three "**The Myths and Discourse of Matrimony**" depicts the family situations and marital relationships that prevail in the present Indian society. The chapter interprets that the bourgeois attitude of men draws limitations to women's rights and choices in the marital bond. Marriage demands women to perform their duties in the name of 'wife service' and 'mother service' where they toil without any recognition for the multifaceted roles they play in the family. Manju Kapur highlights that the emotional trauma of being unrecognised for the sacrifices made to their families make the women protagonists to be caged birds. They attempt to unravel their state of dejection and strive to evade their feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. The novels advocate for a paradigm

shift in the Indian institution of marriage, stimulate women to question the unjust patriarchal norms and encourage them to overcome marital enslavement.

Chapter Four "**Work Environment: Challenges for Women**" reveals the predicaments of women in the workplace. Manju Kapur highlights diverse challenges and hurdles faced by women in the professional sphere, prompting a critical examination of societal structures to offer potential solutions for gender equality and career advancement. The chapter chronicles the need to ascertain female rights to liberate women from workplace harassment. The protagonists undergo a process that involves a gradual transition of their psyche from silence, oppression, and marginality to self-expression, self-assertion, and redefinition of their identity. They are caught between the dichotomy of domesticity and professional obligations when they prefer to be economically independent. They do not wish to be the silent sufferers of tradition, but desire to rebuild the status of women in modern society as they strive to carve their self-identity in the male-dominated professional world. They realise the need for social transformation to uplift the status of women and ensure their economic participation in society.

Chapter Five "**Conclusion**" discusses Manju Kapur as a feminist writer and novelist, who represents the lives of women in India to redefine their position, status, and standards positively. The fictional narratives of Manju Kapur vividly portray the ambivalence of urban educated middle-class Indian women, who navigate between traditional societal norms and the evolution of modernity. The novelist investigates the pivotal issues related to women like motherhood, identity crisis, economic freedom, self-reliance, workplace obligations, and ultimately women's independence. She insists to

emancipate women from the social structures of the past which is the need of the hour to establish their identity. The women protagonists, Virmati, Astha, Nisha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita, and Tapti Gaina wish to reach new horizons towards liberation as they try to find a way to overcome the dilemma of disparity. A transition in the Indian society is expected to necessitate a better living environment where every individual enjoys equal respect and freedom irrespective of their gender. The ambition of women to lead a self-designed life of freedom is not an easy-going process in India. The eminence and integrity of women should be preserved to motivate their unwavering determination to achieve the desired life goals.

Manju Kapur, through the transformation of female protagonists, acknowledges women's self-hood and assertiveness in their journey toward empowerment. The empowerment of women plays a significant role in the nation's growth and progress. It helps to revolutionise the hegemonic set-up and reinforce the democratic values of social justice and independence. A society gains multiple benefits such as increased economic growth, better education outcomes, and enhanced social cohesion when women are empowered. The desires, ambitions, and wellness of women should be prioritised to make their lives meaningful as the '*Nari Shakthi*' (Women Power) of India has the ability and authority to adorn the nation with a prestigious status around the globe.

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Publications

S.No.	Name	Titles of the Papers Published	Names of the Journals
1	Swetha. S, Ph.D. Research Scholar, and Dr. Chitra Sivasubramaniam, Associate Professor, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore 641043.	"Caged Bird Astha in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*"	***Studies in Indian Place Names*** with ISSN no. 2394-3114 Vol:40 issue: 43 Month: February Year: 2020 Impact factor:6.3 UGC – CARE listed Discontinued from April 2020
2	Swetha. S, Ph.D. Research Scholar, and Dr. Chitra Sivasubramaniam, Associate Professor, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore 641043.	"Matrimonial Discourses in Manju Kapur's *Brothers*"	***Inclusive Journal*** with ISSN no. 2778-9758 Vol: II, No. 22, July-August 2023 UGC – CARE listed